

## PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK NAME:** Lewis - White House

**AGENDA ITEM:** B

**OWNERS:** Lawrence E. White

**HPO FILE NO.:** 18PL162

**APPLICANTS:** Lawrence E. White

**DATE ACCEPTED:** MAY-1-2018

**LOCATION:** 2520 Rosedale Street, Houston, Texas, 77004 –  
Riverside Terrace

**HAHC HEARING:** MAY-17-2018

**SITE INFORMATION:** Lots 8 & 9, Tract 7, Block 15, Riverside Terrace Sec 1, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a two-story brick residence and two-story brick garage.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Protected Landmark Designation

Meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6 for Landmark Designation

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Lewis-White House is a two-story brick Mediterranean Revival style home facing northeast on an oversized 20,655-square-foot lot. The home site is .47 acres at the corner of Live Oak and Rosedale streets. It was constructed ca. 1931 in the historic Riverside Terrace neighborhood of Houston. Only two families, both local business owners, have resided in the home during its 87-year history: the Lewis family and the White family.

Mr. Leon Abraham Lewis was born in Russia in 1892 and emigrated to the United States. He and his wife Esther were the first owners of 2520 Rosedale Street. Mr. Lewis was a vice president at Balcke Electric Company and later a real estate professional and owner of the Holman Theatre, a 500-seat movie theater for African American patrons at 3400 Holman.

The current owners, the Louis White family, were also local business owners. For over 50 years Mr. White and his wife Elnora owned and operated the Lyons Supermarket at 3317 Lyons Avenue. The original supermarket building is still standing, but vacant. Mrs. White was known for her pioneering efforts in the civil rights movement in Houston.

The ownership history of the home reflects the changing demographics of the neighborhood. It was initially owned by a family of successful Jewish immigrants (the Lewis family) and later purchased by prominent African American business owners (the White family). Likewise, Riverside Terrace was originally home to many noted Jewish families. Beginning in the 1950s, successful African American families began to buy homes in the neighborhood.

The house at 2520 Rosedale is an excellent example of the Mediterranean Revival style homes popular in Houston in the 1920s and 1930s and found throughout historic neighborhoods such as River Oaks, Broadacres and Riverside Terrace.

## HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

### *ARCHITECTURAL STYLE*

The Lewis-White house is built in the eclectic Mediterranean Revival style, which incorporates multiple styles to capture a desired aesthetic. Rather than draw from a single source, as most revival styles do, the Mediterranean style incorporates elements from Spanish Colonial, Spanish Renaissance, Italian Renaissance, and Venetian architecture, among others.

The style was first introduced in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century and became popular in the 1920s and 1930s. Architect Addison Mizner glamorized the style during the real estate boom in Florida in the 1920s. California architects Bertram Goodhue, Paul Williams and Sumner Spaulding created notable structures in this style. The wealth of the “Roaring Twenties” led to a boom in seaside resorts in the United States, particularly in California and Florida. The warm, tropical, coastal climate in these two states attracted a great number of tourists during the Twenties. Architects in these sunny climes embraced a unique style to enhance the exotic feeling of seaside resorts. California and Florida also share a Spanish Colonial history that, combined with the features of a Mediterranean villa, influenced this design style. The name “Mediterranean Revival” reflects its synthesis of motifs originating in the European Mediterranean countries, including Spain, Italy and Greece.

Characteristics of Mediterranean Revival homes include: two stories, low-pitched hipped roofs made of heavy red tile, broad overhanging eaves, ornate low-relief stonework, and arches, columns, parapets and wrought-iron detail. Exterior walls are sometimes made of buff-colored bricks, but are more commonly composed of hollow tile blocks covered with stucco. Mediterranean Revival style homes are formal in appearance and typically symmetrical, following the rules of Palladian architecture developed during the Italian Renaissance.

The Lewis-White House is an excellent example of this architectural style as it includes many of these elements. The home is constructed of buff-colored brick. It has a low-pitched hipped roof covered in Spanish tile and with a pronounced overhanging eave on one side. While the front (north) façade is not perfectly symmetrical it has symmetrical elements and a formal arrangement of motifs commonly found in Mediterranean Revival style homes including arches, columns, low-relief stonework and detailed wrought iron railings. The left (east) side of the home, which faces Live Oak Street, has a symmetrical arrangement of windows around the central chimney. On the right (west) side of the home, an asymmetrically-placed, grand, oversized arched window echoes the Spanish Colonial style.

### *RIVERSIDE TERRACE*

The first section of Riverside Terrace was platted in 1924. Development of the area was started by Henry Frederick MacGregor, who came to Houston in 1883 and began investing in real estate. By 1900, MacGregor had extended Houston’s residential area southward by building several subdivisions in the South Main area. During the first two decades of the 20th century, “street-car suburbs” flourished in Houston and residential developments spurred the extension of streetcar lines.

By the mid-1920s, the growing popularity of the automobile led to new “automobile suburbs” in Houston. Several of these residential subdivisions were platted out on either side of Brays Bayou near Hermann Park. One such suburb was Riverside Terrace.

When Riverside Terrace opened, early sales brochures stressed its premier location. The subdivision was promoted as being near South Main’s cultural, medical, educational, and social facilities. The first section of the project—an area bounded by Almeda, Blodgett, Live Oak and Oakdale streets—was financed by the Guardian Trust Company. The developer, using the same sales language as the River Oaks Corporation, noted that there would be “rigid building restrictions...so that each purchaser is assured beforehand of the exact character of the improvements with which he will be surrounded.”

The success of Riverside Terrace attracted other developers and the subdivisions of Washington Terrace and Riverside were platted in the vicinity. Today, the entire area is known as Riverside Terrace.

The area was once home to a large number of Jewish families, including such prominent names as Weingarten, Finger, Sakowitz and Battlestein, who were excluded from River Oaks. From the 1930s until the post-war era, the neighborhood was unofficially known as the “Jewish River Oaks,” for its affluent residents and impressive homes, particularly those on MacGregor Drive overlooking Brays Bayou.

Architects who designed the first homes in the neighborhood include John Staub, Birdsall Briscoe, Bolton & Barnstone, and Joseph Finger. Several distinctive modern houses were designed by the office of Bailey A. Swenson. The architectural firm of MacKie and Kamrath also produced homes of modern design. One house, featured in *Architectural Record* in 1942, was described as having excited neighborhood controversy for being so modern. Today, the neighborhood contains numerous outstanding examples of residential architecture ranging from traditional revival styles to late Art Deco and mid-century modern, interspersed with small motels and apartment buildings.

The neighborhood’s demographics began to change in 1952 when wealthy African-American cattleman Jack Caesar moved his family into Riverside Terrace. Caesar remained in his house even after a bomb was detonated on the front porch. In the mid-1950s, white families began moving to more distant suburbs. In the early 1960s, white residents who saw the potential for an integrated neighborhood tried to stabilize the area by posting signs that read, “This Is Our Home, It Is Not For Sale,” which became the title of a 1985 documentary by Jon Schwartz that gives a 60-year overview of the community and its struggle to integrate.

Eventually, all but a few white homeowners left Riverside Terrace, but the neighborhood once again became home to prominent professionals—this time African-American college professors, doctors, lawyers, and politicians. Home construction and commercial development have recently revived, especially on the southern edge of the neighborhood.

*MR. LEON ABRAHAM A. LEWIS (b. June 14, 1892, d. June 26, 1952)*

*MRS. ESTHER LEWIS (b. August 19, 1898, d. March 19, 1974)*

Mr. Lewis and his wife Esther became the first owners of 2520 Rosedale around 1931. They lived in the house with their three children, Bessie, Obbie and Thelma. Leon Lewis emigrated to the United States

from Russia and was married at age 25 to Texas-born Esther Rosenberg. He was the son of Russian parents, Barry T. Lewis and Mushia Finger Lewis. Mr. Lewis began his career as a manager at Balcke Electric Company, where he later became its Vice President. He is listed as a “real estate operator” in the early 1950s by the Texas Department of Vital Statistics. His real-estate holdings included the Holman Theatre, a 500-seat movie theater for African American audiences at 3400 Holman. The theater was in operation from 1942 to 1964. Leon Lewis was laid to rest in the Beth Yeshurun Cemetery on Allen Parkway after his passing at the age of sixty.

*MR. LOUIS WHITE (d. 1967) AND MRS. ELNORA WHITE (b. August 30, 1909, d. July 13, 2002)*

Louis and Elnora White were married in 1929 and owned and operated a successful grocery store for over 50 years that according to the *Houston Chronicle* became a “haven for those who needed credit, counsel and medical help.” The Louis White Grocery was opened in 1925 at 4101 Lyons at Benson and was considered the cornerstone of the neighborhood. It was always thriving, and customers understood that if times were tough, the White family was there to help them. The Whites also owned apartments in the area and were prosperous enough to send their four sons to college.

After her husband’s death in 1967, Mrs. White and her son Carl ran the store until Carl’s passing in 1984. After that the store was leased to others and operated until the early 2000s. Elnora White was an active community member and in the 1940s began taking part in the dawn of the civil rights movement in Houston. A disagreement in her store with a representative from a food company stocking items there led to her arrest for “talking back to a white man.” She was immediately released, but this sparked her pioneering interest in the civil rights movement. Many individuals and groups that Mrs. White worked with on civil rights issues later became leaders in national civil rights organizations. In her obituary published in the *Houston Chronicle* she is described as “particularly generous, a kind humanitarian. Very often renters would be behind on the rent, and she would let them slide... Neighbors would send their kids to her for counseling.” She is remembered by neighbors and friends as a compassionate and generous woman who helped young and old alike when they were in need. Mrs. White had studied nursing and would treat some of the neighbors’ illnesses when they were unable to afford a doctor.

On her 80th birthday Mrs. White was presented with numerous awards and proclamations from dignitaries including the president of the United States, the Texas Legislature, the governor of Texas and the mayor of Houston for her pioneering civil rights efforts. The Whites were members of St. Mary of the Purification Catholic Church at 3006 Rosedale. Mrs. White’s funeral service was held there in July of 2002.

Elnora and Louis White are survived by three of their sons: Louis White, Jr. of Austin, Chuck White of Ohio and Lawrence White of Houston. Mr. Lawrence White is the current owner of the Lewis House on 2520 Rosedale and is seeking its designation as a Protected Houston Landmark.

## **ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY**

The Lewis-White House is a two-story Mediterranean Revival style house with a modified L-shaped plan. The house is covered in a buff brick veneer and rests on a pier-and-beam foundation with buff

brick skirting and rectangular metal vents in a crosshatched pattern. The body of the house has a cross-hipped roof covered in Spanish tile except for the gable-front first (left) bay on the home's main façade. The house has copper gutters and open eaves with scalloped rafter tails. Except for the construction of an elevator shaft at the back of the house in the late 1940s, the house remains largely unchanged from the time it was constructed.

The front (Rosedale) façade of the Lewis-White House contains four bays. The first (left) bay is distinguished by its gable front. The first floor contains a set of three, four-light wood casement windows over a continuous masonry sill. The windows are centered in the bay. There is a rounded arch above each window and each arch contains masonry detailing with a decorative shield. The second floor contains a pair of eight-light metal casement windows with 14-light surround is centered in the bay. The casements open onto a decorative wrought iron balcony supported by four scrolled brackets. The balcony railing includes scrolled elements and twisted balusters. There is a round vent in the gable and a rounded tile cap at the peak of the gable.

The second bay contains a brick entry porch the width of the bay. There are four brick steps between two brick pedestals. The porch, steps and pedestals are topped with broken Saltillo tile in a random pattern. The porch railing matches the railing of the balcony on the second floor of the first bay. A rounded arch doorway is centered on the first floor of the bay. A heavy wooden door is recessed under the arch, which has a decorative masonry surround. There is a round decorative element on the top third of the door and an arched screen door with original hardware. A wrought iron lantern hangs from a scrolled bracket on either side of the entry.

Three sets of six-light metal casement windows are symmetrically spaced on the second floor of the second bay. The windows are between four brick pilasters with masonry Tuscan capitals. Each set of casements has a plain masonry sill. Wrought iron railings that match the pattern of the balcony and porch railings are beneath each set of casements. The railings and pilasters rest on a beveled masonry ledge that itself rests on four corbeled brick brackets.

The third bay of the front façade is deeply recessed behind the first two bays and is narrower than the first and second bays. The first floor of the third bay contains a set of six-light metal casement window with decorative plywood cover. The second floor contains a set of eight-light metal casement windows under a four-light transom. Each set of windows has a masonry sill. The windows on the first and second floors are centered in the bay.

The fourth (right) bay is recessed behind the third bay and is wider than the third bay. The first floor of the fourth bay contains a set of six-light metal casement windows above a double row of glass blocks. The second floor contains a set of eight-light metal casement windows with four-light transom. Each set of windows has a masonry sill. The windows on the first and second floors are centered in the bay.

The secondary (Live Oak) facade of the house is divided into three asymmetrical bays. All of the windows on the first floor of the side elevation are four-light wooden casement windows arranged in pairs under rounded arches that contain masonry detailing with a decorative shield. All of the windows

on the second floor are eight-light metal casement windows with 14-light surrounds. All of the window openings on the first and second floors have masonry sills.

The first (left) bay of the side elevation contains a brick elevator shaft with a flat roof. A one-story flat-roofed wing projects from the second bay. A pair of casement windows is centered on the side of the wing. A brick porch with broken Saltillo tile flooring and a railing that matches the ironwork on the rest of the house connects the second and third bays.

The third bay of the side elevation contains the main body of the house. An exterior, corbeled, brick chimney is centered in the third bay. The chimney includes a scrolled masonry decorative element and a plain masonry cap. A single set of windows is symmetrically placed on either side of the chimney on both floors of the third bay.

A two-story, two-car garage faces Live Oak Street at the rear of the property. It is constructed of the same buff colored brick and has a hipped roof covered in Spanish tile. The garage has open eaves with plain rafter tails. The first floor contains two openings for automobiles and a wooden entry door. The second floor contains two pairs of asymmetrically placed one-over-one sash windows with brick sills.

The right half of the property originally contained a tennis court (now demolished). This portion of the site also contains a massive heritage live oak that is being nominated to the Harris County Tree Registry. Several mature live oaks also surround the house.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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*The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by Lorelei Willett, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.*

## APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION

### Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation

(a) The HAHC, in making recommendations with respect to designation, and the city council, in making a designation, shall consider one or more of the following criteria, as appropriate for the type of designation:

S	NA	S - satisfies	D - does not satisfy	NA - not applicable
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			
	<input type="checkbox"/>			
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			
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<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
<b>AND</b>				
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			

## Sec. 33-229. Criteria for protected landmark designation

S	NA	S - satisfies	D - does not satisfy	NA - not applicable
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	(1) Meets at least three of the criteria for designation in section 33-224 of this Code;		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	(2) Was constructed more than 100 years before application for designation was received by the director;		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	(3) Is listed individually or as a contributing structure in an historic district on the National Register of Historic Places; or		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	(4) Is recognized by the State of Texas as a Recorded State Historical Landmark.		

### STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Protected Landmark Designation of the Lewis-White House at 2520 Rosedale Street.

### HAHC RECOMMENDATION

The Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends to City Council the Landmark Designation of the Lewis-White House at 2520 Rosedale Street, Houston, Texas, 77004

## EXHIBIT A

### PHOTOS

LEWIS-WHITE HOUSE  
2520 ROSEDALE STREET







## EXHIBIT B

### SITE MAP

LEWIS-WHITE HOUSE  
2520 ROSEDALE STREET



# CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

## EXHIBIT C

1924-51 SANBORN FIRE INSURANCE MAP OF HOUSTON, VOL. 9, SHEET 968

LEWIS-WHITE HOUSE

2520 ROSEDALE STREET

